STATE OF THE URBAN FOREST

Tree Policy and Procedural Modifications

Background

This year, the District's arborist (WCA) undertook a survey of the entire urban forest. The results of the survey clearly demonstrate that we are currently experiencing two areas in need of attention. First we need to seriously focus on the condition of the urban forest. Modifications to the District's tree policy also should to be implemented. A third factor, although not related to the survey, is the impact of hardscape repairs currently being done by Orange County and the resultant effect on our parkway trees. This report will focus on these and other important aspects of the District's tree program.

Urban Forest Condition

The average parkway tree remains healthy for approximately 30 to 40 years before it begins the process of decline. The older original trees in Rossmoor are at or reaching the 50 year mark. Safety for Rossmoor residents is coming into question. A pivotal part of the Tree Maintenance program is not only trimming trees but identifying diseased/declining trees/poorly structured trees and then taking prudent action to correct the problem. The Tree Inventory List discussion below, clearly demonstrates the extent of the trees in a declining condition.

Tree Inventory List

As part of the recent Agreement with West Coast Arborists (WCA), it was specified that the Tree Inventory List be updated and that a list of potential problem trees be provided See Exhibit A for a reference for all that follows.

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Exhibit A

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The list of declining trees was divided into two categories: "WCA Diseased/ Declining" and "WCA Poorly Structured". WCA has also provided us with a list of locations which can be used for prioritizing the removal and replacement of those trees. Lists and examples are attached.

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Attachment 1

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The inventory lists from WCA also specified areas concerning community safety which needed immediate action. Seven stumps were identified and have been removed. Trees on the Diseased/Declining and Poorly Structured Trees lists have been inspected. Two trees were identified for immediate removal and 64 others have been listed for removal as soon as possible. Those trees on the removal list will be compared with the current Orange County Public Works (OCPW) hardscape list of work currently underway and be prioritized for removal according to the work being scheduled, as described below.

Orange County Hardscape Repairs

Orange County's Hardscape Repair Program has begun with work on curb and sidewalk repairs in the District. This generally entails the pruning of roots or the removal of some trees associated with the work. We are currently working with the County Area Supervisor and the Project Engineer to coordinate the inspection and to make the determination of only those trees which require removal. The Tree Inventory List is being used to assist in coordinating the efficiency of the work, but also to minimize, as much as possible, the impact to parkway trees.

Ongoing Tree Replacement

The Tree Replacement inventory identified 260 vacant locations for potential tree planting. Forty nine (49) of these sites have been planted and another 72 have been scheduled for next years planting cycle. As trees are removed their location will be updated in the inventory as vacant sites. These sites will then be scheduled for planting in the future as funds become available.

RCSD Approved Parkway Tree List

Currently the RCSD Approved Parkway Tree List, a part of Policy No. 3080 Parkway and Median Tree Maintenance, is being reviewed for updating; identifying those trees which have an adverse effect on hardscape due to root aggressiveness, and excessive fruit droppings which could cause public safety issues. The list also is being reviewed for additional trees which share matching characteristics which could be added to those trees currently on the list.

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Attachment 2

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Rossmoor Tree Variety by Street List

The Rossmoor Tree Variety by Street List currently specifies two tree species per street on a District wide basis. Today there are a number of streets where the specified trees do not match the majority of recently planted trees. In some cases selecting another closely

matching tree, besides adding additional variety to the street, would do more to balance the existing species already located on those streets. Attached is an example of a proposed Master Tree List Planning Guide which sets forth a new *palette* of choices for new tree planting.

Attachment 3

Another recommended modification to the Rossmoor Tree Variety by Street List is to designate specified tree species within hundred block ranges rather than the entire street across the District. This would make the objective of a standardization process more doable and manageable, but still maintain a degree of continuity on a block by block basis.

Attachment 4

Tree Removal

Whenever a tree is selected for removal by the O.C. Public Works Department or the District's Tree Consultant, a new tree will be automatically scheduled for replacement by the Tree Consultant. Saving of a mature tree remains a paramount consideration. Therefore, there are many circumstances which should be considered in determining the need for removal of a tree.

The most prevalent factor for tree removal today is age. As previously stated, the average age for a healthy parkway tree is approximately 30 to 40 years, depending on species and growing conditions. At a given point in time a decision needs to be made regarding public safety and liability issues related to a given tree or species of tree which are considered to be dying, diseased or causing a safety concern.

Currently there are four species growing in Rossmoor which are in this category: Maple, Sycamore, Ash and Mulberry. These trees should be targeted for removal and replacement, as requests for removal are received by the District from residents or deemed a safety hazard through field inspections. Many of these trees are already included in the lists of trees contained in the WCA Diseased/Declining and Poorly Structured Inventory.

Another tree removal factor is the time required to remove a tree which has been approved for removal. In a case such as remodeling, a resident may desire to have a tree removed sooner than later. A resident may then be authorized by the District to remove the tree at their own cost and to pay for the replacement tree.

New Tree Planting

Tree planting in developing cities are usually based a tree planting plan which sets forth basic criteria for a particular tree species on a particular block or blocks. Today, on most streets in Rossmoor, there is an abundance of mixed varieties of trees; these have been planted over the years, without adherence to the specific planting plan enacted when the community was first established. The reasons for this are varied and do not lend value to the future preservation and maintenance of the urban forest.

In some instances residents are adamant about being able to choose trees which they believe to be more aesthetic to recent home or landscape improvements. It is recommended that the District modify the current RCSD Approved Tree Species Plan so that the resident, with approval from the District, may choose a tree from an approved palette of similar species. This will usually guarantee larger, healthier trees more likely to survive. If a homeowner has no preference or fails to respond when notified about a pending tree planting, the selection will be made by the District according to the proposed block planting plan.

A positive result from this approach is it gives the resident a sense of ownership and may engender a tendency to take better care of the tree. In turn, these residents might also spread the word to their neighbors that you can in fact, choose your own tree from the list provided by the District.

New Tree Planting Parameters

It is also recommended that we limit the number of trees to *one* tree in front of each location and *two* on side parkways. Additional trees may add to the total inventory of trees; but also add up to additional tree maintenance and future hardscape repair costs. An average size tree will grow approx 25' to 30' high and 25' to 30' wide. It is essential that trees have ample space to properly grow out and receive adequate sunlight and not create a visual barrier to the property or the street.

Trees should be planted at least 25ft. from corners, 10ft. away from utility poles and at least 6ft. from above-ground utility boxes or fire hydrants. They should also not be planted between driveways or immediately next to driveway approaches. Doing so increases future damage and repair costs.

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Attachment 5

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New Tree Care

Homeowners often remove tree wells around the base of newly planted tree for aesthetic reasons soon after tree planting. This makes it difficult for follow up watering by the arborist or the resident. In the future, it is proposed that trees be planted approximately 3

inches below the level of the grass in order to provide a longer lasting natural well. Using this approach allows the resident or contractor to put mulch at the base of the tree at the time of planting, which encourages growth, weed control, water conservation and provides additional protection to the cambium layer of the skin of the tree.

New trees will need to be pruned to give direction and clearance. This normally starts around the third year after they have been planted and become established. This does vary in some cases depending on species.

Watering, staking and trunk protection are the main concerns with new trees. If the resident has automatic irrigation the tree usually will receive enough water to sustain it. Girdling of the trunk by weed trimmers and mowers is the primary reason for young tree failure. We will be replacing Arbor Guards as needed during field inspections or resident request to reduce young tree loss.

Vacant Site Locations

The total inventory of the urban forest (5,486 trees) does not include 260 vacant sites. Following is information and criteria regarding these sites. The objective for these sites is to plant a tree in as many of these sites as practicable. Following are factors affecting this aspect of tree planting.

Some sites locations were included in the vacant tree category based on the assumption that a second tree or more could be added to the front or side of a particular site. Consideration for the designated species growth pattern and size of a mature tree needs consideration prior to planting. Also, utility clearance for light/power poles, meter boxes, street signs, right of way line of sight should also be factored in.

 Established landscape is another important consideration. In some cases established plantings such as junipers or shrubs in the parkway or established trees in yards are too closely adjacent to the planting area. There are also other factors to consider based on existing tree sites which should influence a decision to plant a tree at a less than desirable location. These include planting of trees off center, numerous trees to close together, numerous trees across front of property or a growing space too small to be considered a suitable planting site. The Vacant Site List is being refined to take these factors into account.

Attachment 6

For now, the District's vacant sites have been inspected and a list of all front site locations meeting acceptable criteria has been compiled for the 2009-10 Fiscal Year planting cycle. Inspections of side yard locations indicate that the majority of these locations have at least one existing tree. These sites will be evaluated as the FY 2010-11 planting list is developed.

Annual Grid Trimming

Grid trimming is divided into four grid areas. Each grid is scheduled for trimming on a four year basis. On average, approximately 1300 trees in a grid are trimmed each year. During the trimming process by WCA, trees are inspected as trimming occurs. Any questionable tree related issue regarding tree safety or the condition of the tree is brought to the attention of the Tree Consultant for his evaluation. In the past most consideration was placed on street clearance and thinning. The approach has now been modifies to assure a more aesthetic approach where possible.

Inspection of trees is an ongoing process by the Tree Consultant and the County Inspector. A list of trees needing attention is compiled and relayed to OCPW to be scheduled for trimming by their contractor (also WCA). This is in addition to the District's grid trimming program.

Attachment 7

Inspections

Tree planting inspections are regularly performed; checking for health, watering, and related issues. Inspections conducted this year should show positive improvement regarding the care taken by residents with their newly planted trees. This is mainly attributable to the information provided to residents at the time of planting and the interaction with residents whenever a question is asked via email or phone calls to the District.

A list will be kept of new trees, as well as mature trees which have died and the likely cause. The objective will be an attempt to prevent the unnecessary loss of trees.

Budget Issues

Some or all of the recommended actions which follow may have budget implications. After a review of this report by the Board, necessary budget adjustments can be considered as a part of the District's Mid-Year Budget Adjustment process in February of 2010.

Recommended Action

1. Develop a long term plan of continued inspections for tree removal and replanting.

2. Update and modify the RCSD Approved Parkway Tree Species List in order to eliminate root aggressive and excessive fruit dropping trees and expand the list to reflect alternative trees which share like characteristics.

3. Modify the Rossmoor Tree Variety by Street List to allow for a palette of trees with similar characteristics as replacement trees.

4. Modify the Rossmoor Tree Variety by Street List from a street name to a block by block to better manage the objective of continuity of trees.

5. Develop an out of grid sequence tree trimming plan for the parks' high maintenance or fast growing trees such as Ficus, Elm and Mulberry.

6. Maintain a current list of locations where newly planted trees (1-3 yrs) have died and been removed with the objective of identifying causes and developing corrective measures.

7. Modify Policy No. 3080 to be reflective of policy and develop procedures to manage the urban forest.

8. Receive this report with no action and schedule a workshop to discuss these issues with the community in a comprehensive manner.